

Vancouver is a young city, incorporated in 1886. Its natural boundaries – ocean, river and mountains – have influenced the evolution of the city's built form. With limited opportunities for peripheral growth, recent development in the City of Vancouver has grown upward instead of outward. Vancouver's downtown core sits on a small peninsula dotted with dense commercial and residential development stretching westward to Stanley Park, one of North America's largest urban parks.

Over the past 30 years, the city's downtown skyline has transformed dramatically, as has its demographic makeup. Recent years have seen a surge in the number of people who call downtown their home. New downtown residents live in a sea of high-rise condominium towers. Modern Vancouver has gained a reputation for dense urban living, so much a part of its identity that the model is often referred to as "Vancouverism."

Vancouver's Central Area Planning department developed the "Living First" strategy in the 1980s, emphasizing housing intensity and diversity; coherent, identifiable neighbourhoods; and regional architectural principles. Living First saw some eight million square feet rezoned from commercial to residential in the downtown core. Railyards and industrial zones along the waterfront were likewise earmarked for housing. This proactive planning agenda, combined with immigration patterns and the economic climate, contributed to a period of dramatic growth. Vancouver's downtown population doubled in the 20 years since the advent of Living First, reaching more than 100,000 residents. As communities such as North False Creek, Coal Harbour and CityGate are completed, more than 120,000 people will live in or adjacent to downtown.

**South False Creek**

**STATS**  
 AREA: 76 ACRES  
 UNITS PER ACRE: 64  
 POPULATION: 4,900  
 HOUSING UNITS: 2,811  
 PARKS/OPEN SPACE: 26 ACRES  
 PARK SPACE PER UNIT: 402 SQUARE FEET

South False Creek, east of the Granville Island Public Market, was the first housing development to appear on the shores of False Creek. The province acquired the land from Canadian Pacific Railway in 1928 and sold it to the City of Vancouver in 1968 at a time when industry moved

offsite. Development guidelines for the area were adopted by city council in 1973, requiring a range of housing to provide a social mix that reflected the city's income and social composition. Construction began in 1976 and continued through to 1990. The 76-acre site now contains 2,800 residential units, 1,040 of which are non-market units.

This low- to mid-rise, medium-density residential development was highly successful and is viewed by many to be one of the more desirable places to live in the city. Building heights range

from an average of three to six storeys up to a maximum of 13 storeys. The neighbourhood offers a mix of community services, public spaces, public transportation, marinas, 25 acres of parkland and 275,000 square feet of commercial space. Various housing alternatives co-exist, including housing cooperatives and public and rental housing. The development's approach to amenities and social diversity presented a new model for urban development.

**North False Creek:  
 Concord Pacific Lands**

**STATS**  
 AREA: 166 ACRES  
 UNITS PER ACRE: 55  
 POPULATION: 13,000  
 HOUSING UNITS: 9,180  
 PARKS/OPEN SPACE: 42 ACRES  
 PARK SPACE PER UNIT: 200 SQUARE FEET

The north shore of False Creek was cleared of virtually all industry in preparation for the Expo '86 World's Fair. Following Expo, the provincial government sold the lands to the Concord Pacific development group and the area was rezoned to a comprehensive mixed-use

development. Concord Pacific has since built out 166 acres of inner city area on this site. The development, Concord Pacific Place, explored urban design strategies for high-density, high-rise residential living. Planning included a seamless integration of market and non-market housing. The development extended the streets of the downtown grid to meet the waterfront, allowing access to a body of water long cut off from the public realm.

Concord Pacific Place contributed to Vancouver's emerging reputation as

a leader in urban revitalization. The neighbourhood integrates a range of civic amenities as part of the rezoning process. These include 42 acres of public park space, a continuous waterfront walk- and bike-way, 25 per cent family-oriented housing, 20 per cent non-market housing, two elementary schools, four daycare centres and a community centre. The development also added space for more than 20,000 new residents downtown, bringing people's homes and workplaces close together, and breathing new life to the inner city.



The Changing City – Vancouver in 1978 and 2003: Downtown and False Creek from the Granville Street Bridge